The AWU – Center for Environmental Research

Austin Water Utility – The University of Texas – Texas A&M University
A Partnership for Urban Ecology and Sustainability: Community, Education, Research
located at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant
2210 South FM 973, Austin, Texas 78725
Website: www.austintexas.gov/cer

AWU-CER Lunchtime Lectures Twice Each Month!

at Dougherty Arts Center
And also at City Hall

Each lecture begins AT NOON

First Tuesday of the Month - Dougherty Arts Center
1110 Barton Springs Road

Same Lecture Repeated Each Month on a Tuesday at City Hall
Boards and Commissions Room 1101

Free and Open to the Public – bring a lunch and learn

2012 A Year of Natural History: Origins, Practices, and Examples

Natural history is the study of plants and animals leaning more towards observational rather than experimental methods. This definition satisfies depending on how much one likes to lean toward observation and if one is a scientist. The originators of natural history were not scientists. In Western history, the origin of the term traces from Aristotle to Pliny the Elder to Linnaeus, a 2000 year journey to someone who might be considered a "scientist". However, the most famous natural history in English was written by Gilbert White, a contemporary of Linnaeus, who was a country clergyman. White's *Natural History of Selborne* inspired a tradition of natural history by nonscientists like Thoreau and others who carefully observed and recorded the nonhumans around them in the place where they lived.

In the 20th century, natural history followed one pathway into scientific research where today it fights to survive in shadow of "experimental" biological science and another pathway into what is now called "nature or environmental writing" where it is best represented by Aldo Leopold, Roy Bedichek, and others in the 20th century and by writers like Gary Nabhan, Robert Michael Pyle, Anne Zwinger, and others in the present century.

Today, natural history is bound up in the reassessment of cultural and scientific assumptions about the natural history of the Earth. Contemporary work in geography, archeology, anthropology, and environmental history has forced biologists and ecologists to reconsider assumptions about the natural history of the Americas and other regions where concepts like "native species" and "wilderness" have been shown to be based more on culture than science. Hence, the lectures this year will all have bearing on the ongoing reassessment of ecology and biology.

Natural History and Ecological Change – Americas, Texas, and Austin [May – July]

From spring into summer, we will learn about the natural history of where we live at different spatial scales. First, we will look at the natural history of the Americas as it was described by early explorers like Von Humboldt and others in the 18th and early 19th century and by the biological surveys of the late 19th century which documented the transformation of the natural history of the Americas by the development of modern society. We will then shift more locally in scale and focus on the natural history of Texas documented by the work of scientists like Bailey and Oberholser in the great biological surveys of Texas and more literary types of natural histories in writings ranging from Lincecum to Bedichek. Finally, we will look at the natural history of Austin from the 19th century to the present where observers ranging from university researchers and "citizen scientists" to writers like Bedichek have documented the changing plants and animals of the Austin area.

May 1 at Waller Center - The Natural History of the Americas: Discovery and Transformation
May 15 at City Hall - The Natural History of the Americas: Discovery and Transformation

June 5 at Waller Center - The Natural History of Texas: Biological Survey and Ecological Change
June 19 at City Hall - The Natural History of Texas: Biological Survey and Ecological Change

July 3 at Waller Center - The Natural History of Austin: Biological Context and Urbanization
July 17 at City Hall - The Natural History of Austin: Biological Context and Urbanization

Unnatural History – Urban Natural History [August – December]

We will finish the year exploring an often neglected type of natural history - urban natural history. First, we will look at examples of how natural history is practiced in cities from London to Berlin to New York and then literary examples natural histories of cities. Then we will look closely at the natural [and unnatural] history of three different places in Austin which are iconic types of urban habitats: a creek, a vacant lot, and a sewage farm. We will end the year looking forward at the possibilities for natural history and nonhumans in a human dominated world.

August 7 at Waller Center - Urban Natural History: Life in the City
August 28 at City Hall - Urban Natural History: Life in the City

September 4 at Dougherty Arts Center - The Natural History of an Urban Creek: Waller Creek
September 18 at City Hall - The Natural History of an Urban Creek: Waller Creek

October 2 at Dougherty Arts Center - The Natural History of an Urban Vacant Lot: Tannehill Urban Wild Woodland
October 23 at City Hall - The Natural History of an Urban Vacant Lot: Tannehill Urban Wild Woodland

November 6 at Dougherty Arts Center - The Natural History of an Urban Wasteland: Hornsby Bend
November 20 at City Hall - The Natural History of an Urban Wasteland: Hornsby Bend

December 4 at Dougherty Arts Center - Natural and Unnatural History: the Path Forward
December 18 at City Hall - Natural and Unnatural History: the Path Forward

AWU-CER Coordinator - Kevin M. Anderson is a geographer and philosopher who is the coordinator of the AWU - Center for Environmental Research. Kevin has studied at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania [BA], Durham University, England, Ohio University [MA] where he taught philosophy and symbolic logic for several years. He received his Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin with a dissertation entitled: *Marginal Nature: Urban Wastelands and the Geography of Nature*. His research interests include soil ecology and sustainable agriculture, urban ecology and sustainability, riparian ecology, environmental philosophy and literature. He is a co-founder of the Texas Riparian Association. [Email: Kevin.Anderson@austintexas.gov]